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## Scientific studies build evidence that prayer leads to better health

ST. LOUIS (CNS) — Members of church prayer circles have been saying it for years — prayer can heal. And now some scientists are agreeing.

A new study by psychologists at the St. Louis University School of Medicine says that although there is not enough scientific evidence to definitively prove a correlation between prayer and healing, results of experiments over the past 30 years "encourage further study."

"The Effect of Prayer on Physical Health: Experimental Evidence" was written by Paul Duckro of the university's Health Sciences Center and Philip R. Magaletta of the psychology department.

Their article was published in the fall 1994 Journal of Religion and Health, a quarterly magazine

based in New York.

"Although this review provides a stimulating and rich foundation for further study, there is not enough scientific data at this time to indicate with certainty that prayer directly causes better health or improved healing," said Duckro. A professor of psychiatry and human behavior, he is director of the Program for Psychology and Religion in the division of behavioral medicine.

In their study, Duckro and Magaletta looked at various studies conducted in the past 30 years on the direct effects of prayer on physical health.

A 1969 study, for example, divided 18 children with leukemia into two groups. Families in a Protes-

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# Spiritual



# healing

## *Priest stresses that Christ's healing meant to treat soul as well as body*

Father Richard McAlear still remembers the first time he used the gift of healing during the early 1970s.

Then involved with the Catholic Charismatic movement, the St. Louis priest was approached by a woman in her late 50s, following a prayer meeting in Buffalo. The woman complained of a bad back after her kitchen door had become unhinged and fell on her as she was painting.

"We said a prayer and I put my left hand on her forehead and my right hand on her back," recalled Father McAlear, who now serves as vocations director for the Eastern American Province of the Oblates of Immaculate Mary. "We heard a loud snap and everything was back in place. I was more surprised than anyone."

From that point on, word spread of Father McAlear's gift for healing. By 1976, the priest had left his position at a local high school and took on the healing ministry full time.

Father McAlear spoke to the *Catholic Courier* by telephone from St. Louis, where he was on official business for his order. He currently resides in Washington, D.C.

In addition to his duties as vocations director, Father McAlear noted that he celebrates at least two healing services every week throughout the country. He has also traveled abroad to minister to Christians and non-Christians alike.

Father McAlear is slated to visit St. Louis Church, 60 Main St., Pittsford, to celebrate a healing Mass on Friday, Nov. 4, at 7:30 p.m., according to the Inter-Parish Ministry, the visit's sponsor.

At the conclusion of the Mass, the Eucharist will be exposed in a monstrance, the priest explained.

"That is so people's focus is on Jesus, not on me," Father McAlear said.

Afterward, people will be invited to come forth and be anointed with oil by the priest, who said that participants may feel bathed in Christ's love, forgiven for past sins, or freed from an emotional or spiritual weight that has burdened them.

Some participants, he said, may even experience the phenomenon of "resting in the Spirit" in which they are momentarily caught up in spiritual ecstasy, which sometimes temporarily immobilizes them and causes them to lay down.

The next day, Nov. 5, Father McAlear will teach about the ministry of healing in the parish gym at 10 a.m. The event is free and open to the public; participants are urged to bring a brown-bag lunch. Beverages will be provided.

Father McAlear will offer his gift of healing to all who

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